

## Australian Archaeology



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## TWO REMARKABLY PARALLEL CAREERS

D.J. Mulvaney

*On the 18th of April 1980 two famous Australian pre-historians, F.D. McCarthy and N.B. Tindale, were admitted, honoris causa, to the degree of Doctor of Science at the Australian National University, on the grounds of their distinguished creative achievement as scholars. The citation by D.J. Mulvaney is reprinted below.*

Mr Chancellor, it is my privilege to present for a degree of the University, Frederick David McCarthy and Norman Barnett Tindale.

The simultaneous presentation of two candidates for its highest degree constitutes university recognition of the distinguished pioneering contribution by two scholars whose remarkably parallel careers opened up insights into diverse aspects of Aboriginal Australia. That Australia today is a major force in world prehistory, that Aboriginal people draw freely upon evidence of their past achievements in their present search for identity and their struggle for justice, and that of any university ANU attempts the most comprehensive research and teaching into Aboriginal society, are landmarks in Australian culture which owe much to the stimulus provided by the initiative, industry and persistence of McCarthy and Tindale in the face of the apathy of earlier generations.

The term Prehistory is employed deliberately in Australia to cover a broad interdisciplinary span, including archaeology, material culture and technology, the art both of rock faces and moveable items, cultural ecology and subsistence economy, ethnographic research both in the field and into museum collections, and the use of historical records. Tindale and McCarthy are nationally significant figures for their pioneering roles in all these disparate fields. Both of them proved unusually sensitive for their time to the existence of Aboriginal society and sought, in different ways, to record activities and data that were in the process of being lost.

We are honouring scholars who were museum curators during a depressed period of Australia's cultural history, when museums were the cinderella of research institutions, chronically understaffed, overcrowded and commanding little support from either the public or the private sector. Significantly, they served their institutions for some years even before Australia's first anthropology department was established at the University of Sydney in 1926. Over two decades elapsed before anthropology was taught at any other university, while even Sydney delayed the teaching of Prehistory for a further thirty-six years.

Posts and promotions were rare during those financially bleak, hierarchical times, and both Norman Tindale and Fred McCarthy served apprenticeships in other public service duties. Tindale accepted a cadetship in the South Australian Public Library, alongside Sir Mark Oliphant, transferring in 1919 to the South Australian Museum, as Assistant Entomologist. Only in 1928 was he appointed Ethnologist and later still promoted to the Curatorship of Anthropology. McCarthy joined The Australian Museum in 1920, also as a Library Assistant, followed by years as a cadet in the Department of Birds and Reptiles. It was 1933 before he became Assistant Curator of Anthropology and a further eight years before he assumed the Curatorship.

It is relevant that 1933 was also the year in which the Carnegie Corporation commissioned a report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia. It makes depressing reading. Its concluding paragraph gloomily observed of museum curators, that Australia owed them 'a debt hitherto unacknowledged either in terms of adequate remuneration or reasonable facilities for travel, investigation or mutual co-operation'. Even in 1975, the Australian Government Report on Museums in Australia regretted that 'a scholar who works for a museum soon learns that other educational institutions are, generally, more attractive', and that staff exchange facilities were inadequate. Assessed from this perspective, it is remarkable to what an extent McCarthy and Tindale engaged in extensive fieldwork and original museum research, each publishing well over 200 titles in books, memoirs and scientific journals, many of them still essential references.

During 1921-22, entomologist Tindale joined a museum expedition to scientifically unknown Groote Eylandt. The fact that he was expected to double as ethnologist determined his future career. He was sent first to Melbourne to learn the rudiments of anthropology from Australia's greatest anthropologist, Sir Baldwin Spencer. This contact merits comment as a remarkable continuity in anthropological history. Spencer's three chief mentors were biologist H.H. Moseley, disciple and friend of Charles Darwin, E.B. Tylor, effective founder of British anthropology, and Australian polymath A.W. Howitt, himself a disciple of the American ethnologist, Lewis Henry Morgan. Tindale learned more than 'social Darwinism' or the compilation of kinship tables during this crash course, however, for he accepted some practical advice from Spencer and converted it into a rule of life. Six decades later, Tindale still follows Spencer's precept for the daily routine, by keeping a detailed scientific journal, no matter what the personal inconvenience. Over 100 of his meticulous field journals destined for the South Australian Museum provide a rich resource for future research.

Groote Eylandt stimulated Tindale's omniverous interests, as indicated by the 7000 insects, 164 bird skins, 487 ethnological objects, word lists, songs, myths and ceremonies, tracings of rock art, hunting techniques and dietary details which he collected there. In 1927 he repeated the record, when he documented unique details of Aboriginal life on Princess Charlotte Bay, Cape York. Over a half a century later, when first-hand informants sadly have vanished, this information is proving invaluable in an archaeological survey of this area by ANU graduate, Dr John Beaton. Through the 'thirties' Tindale was a vital member of expeditions in Central Australia mounted by the Board of Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide. The films made of traditional

Aboriginal groups during these visits constitute one of the most important surviving visual documents of Aboriginal society as it was in arid zones.

In 1938-39 and again in 1952-4, Tindale teamed with the American physical anthropologist, J.B. Birdsell, on wide ranging field investigations in almost every region from Bass Strait to the Atherton Tableland, the arid centre to the Kimberley coast. Birdsell acknowledges that Tindale's advice and encouragement was a crucial factor in his distinguished research on racial distribution and demography. The climax of Tindale's own research was his classic survey, Aboriginal Tribes of Australia. It was co-published by ANU Press in 1974, and includes a major contribution on Tasmanian tribes written by Dr Rhys Jones of this university. The map of tribal distribution accompanying Tindale's book provides the indispensable reference on Australian tribes. Both Tindale and Birdsell resumed their collaboration in 1973, while Visiting Fellows in the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies. It provided an opportunity for an important revisionist seminar arranged and published in their honour, Tribes and Boundaries in Australia.

Funding constraints delayed McCarthy's first major contact with traditional Aborigines until his participation in the 1948 American-Australian Expedition to Arnhem Land. One aspect of his varied research activities there attracted world-wide notice. With Margaret McArthur, he designed an exercise in the quantitative evaluation of food procurement and time expenditure by a group of Arnhem Land people. It was possibly the world's first example of a systematic concern with the actual processes of production and consumption in a hunter-gatherer society. During the past decade such 'ethnoarchaeological' investigations have attracted the interest of prehistorians everywhere, and this Arnhem Land precedent is widely cited. Comparable studies today form a central focus for much research directed from the Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies.

McCarthy achieved distinction in two other important areas of research, Aboriginal rock art and stone artefacts. Across forty years he has published numerous detailed records of art on rock faces, much of which he traced or drew to scale under conditions of considerable difficulty. Major memoirs resulted on the art of Arnhem Land, the Pilbara coast and the Cobar and Mootwingee areas of NSW. The art of the Sydney region has provided a continuous challenge and McCarthy is currently reassembling published and original data from a lifetime of research during weekends and vacations. Two museum handbooks written on Aboriginal Decorative Art and on Rock Art and numerous other publications informed a wide public on the merits of Aboriginal art. This was many years before this art form became 'acceptable' for art gallery display or for coffee-table book publication. It is appropriate that this month, the Australian Museum reissued the superbly illustrated fourth edition of Australian Aboriginal Rock Art. Over 100,000 copies of these museum books have been sold.

In the early 1960s McCarthy documented art and dance in Cape York and collected decorated objects for the National Ethnographic Collection. The significance of this research has not been realised fully, but it occurred prior to the great economic changes in that region consequent upon mining and fishing developments. Parallel research was undertaken in the region from 1960 by Tindale, on the

offshore islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria. He concentrated upon invaluable ecological and demographic data also which could not have been collected later.

No student of Aboriginal stone tools can neglect Fred McCarthy's memoir, The Stone Implements of Australia, published in 1946 with the collaboration of museum colleague Elsie Bramell who was, by then, Mrs McCarthy. It is fashionable today for many young prehistorians to disparage the study of stone tools. Certainly, nobody considers them an end in themselves as did early cabinet collectors. The fact remains, however, that they constitute the most common and durable relics from antiquity and they contain coded cultural information of various kinds. McCarthy's memoir will remain a classic because he first attempted a systematic decoding, conceived within the limits of knowledge and technology of the day.

Both Tindale and McCarthy experienced the stimulus of foreign travel in a remarkably parallel manner. Tindale went overseas on a Carnegie Grant in 1936 and, in Holland, he inspected artefacts from southeast Asia. McCarthy worked in southeast Asia during 1937-38. They were influenced profoundly by their experiences, for both men perceived that Australia could not be considered as an isolated refuge of mankind. In important survey articles published at that time, they became outward looking, or diffusionist in approach, variously emphasising connections inferred from the stone tools of Sumatra, Java and Celebes and the possibility of change through time. In retrospect, these insights redirected Australia's past into the mainstream of global prehistory, but few contemporaries appreciated their implications. In those days, the small interested band of stone collectors, Australia's closest approximation to prehistorians, was stoutly isolationist and envisaged Aborigines as 'unchanging people in an unchanging environment'.

Contemporaries already had ignored Norman Tindale and his museum zoologist colleague, Herbert Hale, and had failed to appreciate the significance of their archaeological excavations at Devon Downs. Every prehistorian today acknowledges that their 1929 excavation in a rock-shelter on the lower Murray River was the classic dig and the forerunner of modern excavation and scientific analytical techniques. They systematically excavated and sieved through some metres of archaeological deposit, recognising the stratigraphic layers, retrieving and labelling a wide assortment of finds and interpreting them in the light of cultural and environmental change. Their techniques were in advance of any archaeologist in the Pacific region and the Hale and Tindale report on Devon Downs will live in archaeological history. It was no accident that my own archaeological career began at Fromm's Landing in 1956, a few kilometres downstream from Devon Downs, or that Norman Tindale visited us during the first season.

McCarthy was also a pioneer archaeologist. He excavated extensively in Arnhem Land and in NSW, especially at Capertee. He also published reports of excavations, such as Lapstone Creek, commenced by others with fewer qualifications and less perseverance. Archaeologists working in eastern Australia need to take his reports into account still, despite the numerous sites subsequently investigated in that region. It is well known that McCarthy and Tindale published syntheses of Australian prehistory during the 'fifties which conflicted. In retrospect, these early pan-continental schemes were proposed at a time when basic excavations were both few and regionally confined. The value of

their systems for stimulating research two decades ago is not diminished by hindsight. With so few workers and temporal or spatial bounds both ill-defined, these were stirring times. 'Cavemen come to blows' was the headline in one tabloid during 1962, which reviewed rival claims and fieldwork by McCarthy and Tindale, invoking Mulvaney in the process. It will delight their friends who experienced those controversial times, that both Norman Tindale and Fred McCarthy consider that the honour of this conferring has been magnified by its duality.

McCarthy made a major contribution to what today is termed Public Archaeology. For many years he agitated for adequate statutory protection of Aboriginal antiquities in NSW and was active in successful moves to proclaim National Parks. He edited a conference volume on antiquities in Australia which helped modify Federal government policy. He served on the Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO. Between 1938 and 1970 he organised five major exhibitions of Aboriginal art, three of which travelled overseas. Like Tindale, he held high office in his state's Royal Society, Anthropological Society and other learned bodies. Like Tindale also, he was a Foundation Member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. In 1964 he became the first Principal of that Institute. As such, he played a crucial role in its development and in the range of its activities. He forged close links with this university, working with Professors W.E.H. Stanner and J.A. Barnes in establishing administrative structures which drew much upon ANU practice. The first Chairman of Council was Professor A.D. Trendall, while the Executive Committee during McCarthy's Principalship normally included two ANU members.

Tindale maintained a life interest in entomology, stimulated by his initial zoological training. This research is one reason for his current visit from California where he now lives. His chief concern is the taxonomy and biology of the more primitive Lepidoptera and Orthoptera. His papers include numerous studies of butterflies, ghost moths and mole-crickets. One important discovery was of fossil Lepidoptera amongst material from Triassic beds in Queensland. His revision of the Hepialidae group in the 'thirties represented a major advance which won him international recognition in that taxonomic arena. He used his expertise to infuse understanding of Aboriginal exploitation of these food resources. In addition to economic uses, however, he examined mythological themes, such as that of the witchety grub.

I owe a deep personal debt for the advice I received from both Tindale and McCarthy when I commenced fieldwork during the 'fifties. There are others at this university who also acknowledge their gratitude for assistance. For example, the important prehistoric research initiated in the Oenpelli area by Professor Golson drew heavily upon McCarthy. Professor Wurm depended upon him as Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies when developing a programme of linguistic research. One of the first projects commissioned by the AIAS Principal was a demographic study of Bathurst Island by F. Lancaster Jones. Professor Fenner's first publication resulted from fieldwork with Tindale in 1934. Dr Rhys Jones derived inspiration from Tindale's ecological approach to human society, particularly from his belief that the role of man the firelighter merited investigation.

Mr Chancellor, as this university is the most significant centre of teaching and research in the areas of their lifework, it is with great personal pleasure that I present to you Frederick David McCarthy and Norman Barnett Tindale, that you may confer on them the degree of Doctor of Science honoris causa on the ground of their distinguished creative achievements as scholars.

#### ADDENDUM

One of the most interesting connections involved a happy coincidence which came to my attention only after this address was printed. At this same conferring a long-time ANU staff member, R.J. Lampert, received his PhD. Ronald Lampert's thesis concerned the archaeology of Kangaroo Island, a problem first investigated by Tindale and recognised by him as a crucial subject; Lampert is currently McCarthy's successor at the Australian Museum, as Curator.